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May 21, 1971

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MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. KISSINGER

FROM: W. R. SMYSER

SUBJECT: CIA Report on the Detection of North Vietnamese Infiltration

In accordance with the request in your memorandum of April 20, Mr. Helms has sent you a status report on the efforts of the intelligence community to detect North Vietnamese infiltration (Tab B). A summary follows.

The current situation. There have been no major changes in our overall ability to detect North Vietnamese infiltration since the USIB issued its memorandum on this subject on March 19. We have been unable to detect infiltration groups in North Vietnam since January, but we are [redacted] on enemy infiltration groups moving through the Laotian panhandle. As a result, our current estimates are lagging behind those prior to January by as much as six to eight weeks. We remain reasonably confident, however, of our current ability so long as present circumstances do not change.

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The outlook. [redacted]

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[redacted] On the other hand, the North Vietnamese appear to be increasingly conscious [redacted] and they are continuing to expand their already extensive system of secure landlines in the Lao panhandle.

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NSS Review Completed.

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Mr. Helms notes that the detection of enemy infiltration continues to be a matter of the highest concern to the whole intelligence community, and he promises to keep you informed of future developments as they occur.

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Aside from whether we receive any infiltration estimates at all is the question of their timeliness. In this respect, we have already suffered a serious loss, since current infiltration estimates now lag six to eight weeks behind those prior to January. The intelligence community would once more have to detect infiltration groups moving in North Vietnam in order to regain this loss of lead time. The prospects for such a development are definitely not good.

Other circumstances make this loss of lead time particularly unfortunate. The President, for example, will be announcing another decision on troop withdrawals sometime in mid-November. At that time, we will be fortunate if we have even some idea of the infiltration groups which departed North Vietnam in September, two months earlier. But infiltration starts in September do not usually reveal anything very useful. The rainy season is only beginning to subside at that point, and infiltration starts in October, the first full month of the dry season, are more helpful in gauging the magnitude of infiltration.

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Of course, infiltration starts at the beginning of the season do not always give us a full picture. For example, during the 1970-71 season infiltration starts were very high at the beginning and lower at the end. But the early information is still very useful.

We have drafted a memorandum from you to Mr. Helms urging the intelligence community to maintain a high priority effort on this problem (Tab A).

RECOMMENDATION:

That you forward the memorandum at Tab A to Mr. Helms.

Concurrence: Mr. Sansom

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MEMORANDUM FOR

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Detection of North Vietnamese Infiltration

I appreciated your report of May 10 on this subject, and the effort which the intelligence community has made to date. Future reports will also be welcome as this effort continues, especially in view of the critical need for accurate estimates of enemy infiltration as early as possible during the next dry season.

(Signed) HENRY A. KISSINGER

Henry A. Kissinger

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